

COPING WITH STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

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Stress affects everyone. It is the body's reaction to any change that needs a response or the feeling of being under abnormal pressure, which can be either positive or negative. Whether positive or negative, stress can strain your body and make it hard to function normally. Stress can be caused by several factors such as marriage, holidays, starting a new job, the death of a loved one, emotional problems, financial obligations, a traumatic event, and many other things. Stress can contribute to mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, psychosis, and post-traumatic stress disorder. It is important to learn how to manage stress in a healthy and safe way through proper coping mechanisms.



Creative Outlet for Coping with Stress.
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Signs of Stress

There can be physical, mental, and behavioral signs of stress.

Physical signs may include:

- Headaches
- Sweating
- Stomach problems
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling tired or dizzy
- Cold or sweaty hands and feet

Mental signs of stress may include:

- Being forgetful
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Feeling irritable
- Constant worrying
- Racing thoughts

Behavioral signs may be: Eating more or less

- Avoiding others
- Having problems sleeping
- Procrastinating and avoiding responsibilities
- Increase use of alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes
- When you experience these signs, it is important to recognize that you are feeling stressed. Your response to stress can impact your health in a positive or a negative way. Make sure that you choose healthy ways to cope with stress.

Stress and Chronic Conditions

One may try to reduce stress with unhealthy behaviors such as eating a poor-quality diet, low exercise levels, smoking, or excessive alcohol consumption. This can increase a person's risk of developing chronic conditions and can make the management of chronic conditions more difficult.

Stress affects the immune system and inflammatory processes and can have the potential to influence depression, coronary artery disease, and some cancers. High levels of stress can increase blood cholesterol, triglycerides, blood sugar, and blood pressure. These can all increase your risk for chronic conditions, such as heart disease and diabetes.

Living with a chronic condition, like diabetes, can trigger emotions such as anxiety and stress. Stress can make it more difficult to control diabetes as it may affect your daily routine, immune system, and blood sugar. Stress levels may rise when having to plan meals and measure blood sugar. Stress can also cause hormones to stimulate the liver to release stored sugar, causing blood sugar levels to rise and make management more difficult. It is important to know how to reduce and cope with stress in order to prevent and manage diabetes.

Coping Mechanisms

There are several ways you can cope with stress in a healthy way. When you are experiencing stress, it is important to identify what is triggering the feeling. Then, you can decide how to cope with the trigger.

Exercise

Exercise can be very effective in relieving stress. It increases the production of endorphins, which are your brain's "feel-good" neurotransmitters. It can also help regulate your sleep, which is often disrupted by stress, depression, and anxiety. Exercising can also boost your energy and help you remain calmer and more focused.

Any form of exercise or movement can increase your fitness level while decreasing stress. Some examples include walking, yoga, jogging, stair climbing, bicycling, weightlifting, swimming, yoga, and more. It is important to choose an activity that you enjoy.

Meditation

Meditation is another way to cope with stress. It can be a quick-fix stress reliever to help you physically relax. Ten to twenty minutes of quiet reflection can help alleviate stress and increase your tolerance to it.

Meditation affects the body in the opposite way stress does. It triggers the body's relaxation response and brings the body to a calm state. It can quiet stress-induced thoughts and can help the body repair itself from the physical effects of stress.

Meditation involves sitting in a relaxed position and clearing your mind. Or, you can focus your mind on one thought and clear it of all others. You can focus on a sound, on your own breathing, counting, or nothing at all. You can listen to music, relax, and try to think of pleasant things.

Journaling

One way to reduce stress is to write in detail about feelings and thoughts related to stressful events. It can help clarify how you are feeling, allowing you to gain a clearer perspective. Journaling can be used as a problem-solving tool to come up with solutions more easily on paper.

Your journal does not need to follow any certain structure. Let your words flow freely. Try to write about your thoughts, hopes, fears, frustrations, and any other emotions you are experiencing.

Connect to Others

Spending quality time with others who make you feel safe and understood can be calming and triggers hormones that counteract the body's "fight or flight response". It is a natural stress reliever. Make sure to talk to others who you feel that you can trust. Talking to others can help you to get your thoughts out, like journaling, but you can receive advice and suggestions from your trusted friend or family member.

Overall, research has shown that social connection is associated with increased happiness and better health. Reach out to friends or family who you feel comfortable to be with, make you feel valued, and take your concerns seriously.

Therapy

If you feel as if you need additional help dealing with stress and overall mental health, consider seeking professional help through therapy. Therapy can give you an outlet to talk about your stress and learn how to identify the main causes of stress in your life. Therapy can help teach you how to incorporate tools for reducing stress daily.

These coping mechanisms can help alleviate stress and help with your overall mental health. Try practicing these healthy coping mechanisms, along with getting enough sleep and eating healthy to help alleviate stress and better your overall mental health.

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